

1979

# The Recording and Analysis of Private Relic Collections and Associated Archeological Sites in South Carolina: A Pilot Study

Tommy Charles

*University of South Carolina - Columbia*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/sciaa\\_staffpub](https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/sciaa_staffpub)



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

---

## Publication Info

Published in *Notebook*, Volume 11, Issue 1-4, 1979, pages 13-17.

<http://www.cas.sc.edu/sciaa/>

© 1979 by The South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology

This Article is brought to you by the Archaeology and Anthropology, South Carolina Institute of at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty & Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu).

THE RECORDING AND ANALYSIS OF PRIVATE RELIC COLLECTIONS  
AND ASSOCIATED ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES IN SOUTH CAROLINA:  
A PILOT STUDY

By Tommy Charles

A growing concern for the rapidly increasing destruction of our prehistoric archeological sites over the past several decades has prompted the South Carolina Department of Archives and History to join with the Institute of Archeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina, to fund jointly a systematic search of the state for collectors of Indian artifacts, believing their collections to be the best source of information about sites that have been or are in the process of being destroyed.

Trained archeologists and the funds to investigate the many sites destroyed yearly are simply not available. On the other hand, there is hardly a cleared site in the state that is not being collected by one or more amateurs. The knowledge to be obtained from these collections and the observations of those that collected them are too great to ignore. Unfortunately many of the older collectors have died without any chance to share their knowledge with us and have left no records of their finds.

Still there are hundreds of active collectors around the state today, and the number grows yearly. For many this is the only phase of archeology to which they have been exposed. In addition to the knowledge obtainable from them, the survey offers a golden opportunity to establish a new spirit of cooperation between the professional and collector, and a chance to impress upon them the importance of preserving the heritage of our state, and a feeling of being a part of the archeological process of our state.

METHODS AND PROBLEMS

After ironing out last minute details, the survey was begun October 1, 1979, in Beaufort, that area being chosen because James L. Michie, Archeologist with the Institute, was conducting a survey of archeological sites in Port Royal Sound Broad River estuary, and in the process had acquired a number of collectors' names for me. At the same time, Stanley A. South, also an Archeologist with the Institute, was conducting a preliminary excavation at Santa Elena on Parris Island. This had created a great deal of interest in the area and I felt it might be beneficial to take advantage of this.

Contacting collectors referred by Michie as a starting point, some were quickly eliminated because they had disposed of their collections. Several in this category were widows who did not share their husbands' interest and did not know where the materials were collected or where the collections were presently located. This has since proven to be a common occurrence.

My first appointment was with the owner of a modest collection by some standards, and even though I had established in my mind procedures I would use, trial and error changed some of these, as could be expected. The logistics of getting even a small collection out of storage and spread around a room to inspect and photograph involved a little more than I had expected.



Fortunately most of the collections in the area were small and no major problems were encountered.

Basically Beaufort was a learning experience, and after my first week in Beaufort I found the telephone to be my greatest timesaver. Failure to get as much information as possible can result in a lot of wasted time. One half day was spent waiting to see a "collector"; it turned out he had two points! Qualifying the collector is a must; time spent on the phone is more than made up in time saved not making non-productive trips.

In making appointments, usually a number of introductory calls are made, explaining what we are attempting to accomplish, and in doing so trying to establish some priorities: which collection is oldest; which collection is largest; which collection is local; which collection is state-wide; which collection is bought; which collection is traded. All these enter into making a decision as to whom to visit first.

While we certainly want to give priority to the elderly collectors, we can ill afford to neglect the conscientious young collectors who may have only a few artifacts, but if encouraged to record their finds and to keep good site records, may prove to be more valuable than some of the elderly who have acquired large but poorly recorded collections.

The first visit with the collector is seldom more than a goodwill mission: to get a feel for the situation and to work out details, such as work area, time allowable, etc.

Normally a collection will be photographed first if it is conveniently displayed. If stored, artifacts are recorded, and ones to be photographed are kept out until later. If artifacts are separated by site, they are recorded as such. Few collectors have done this even though they record the sites. Usually they display them by types, materials, or whatever pleases them.

All artifacts are recorded by types and material. Any that are rare or unusual are recorded and photographed separately. Any unusual raw materials or alteration of artifacts (heat treated chert, for example) are noted. All available sites, collected or not, are recorded.

Each collector is given an application for the Archeological Society of South Carolina and urged to join; if they indicate their friends might be interested, several forms are left for them.

One of the problems most difficult to overcome is the inability to keep to a planned schedule. Invariably, the best laid plans fall prey to snow, sickness in the family, death of a friend, job demands, etc. All of these have been cause for delay during the past several months.

Some second thoughts have occurred about trying to record 100% of a collection. Time consumed in counting even a modest collection can sometimes be prohibitive, depending on how they are displayed or stored. Do they have to be moved to another area of the house? Can they be photographed without being moved? As an example, 25 days, working 4-5 hours a day were spent recording only 11,581 artifacts. Most of the artifacts were packed



away, resulting in cramped quarters. On the other hand, 13,415 artifacts were recorded in only five days under ideal conditions and with help from the collectors.

Perhaps we should count only a portion of each large collection, and based on the percentages of types and materials, estimate the rest, taking care to record the more unusual or rare items, and perhaps taking more photos. This would give us time to visit more collectors. I feel in the long run we will gain far more than we lose, particularly site information.

#### WHO COLLECTS?

The greatest number fall into the "farm boy" category: a person who has a cigar box full of artifacts collected from the family farm, but who lost interest at an early age. The collections are put away, to be forgotten or perhaps to find their way into the hands of collectors that buy artifacts.

Most of the hard core collecting is being done by young to middle-aged married couples that simply like to get out and ramble. Some of them collect only in a radius of a few miles of their home, others cover several counties or even several states. Most only surface collect, but a few are very destructive, digging mounds and shell middens, and diving in rivers and streams for artifacts.

Most collectors prize their artifacts highly and will not buy, sell or swap. Others have acquired large collections by buying, swapping, etc.

A few have a lot of fake material, but will swear it was found almost in their backyard.

Excellent records are kept by some, others have none at all. It seems the young people are doing a better job in this respect than the old. Maybe the young are becoming interested in our heritage at an earlier age than our parents. In the last two months teachers from Aiken and Blackville have asked for information on books about Indians and archeology for students in elementary and junior high school. The avid collector will have from one to a dozen books concerning Indians, mostly artifact oriented, Discovering South Carolina, by Bert W. Bierer being a particular favorite.

Collecting varies from individuals that spend several days a year at their hobby, to family outings complete with picnic several times a month. The lakes and coastal islands are favorite collecting areas.

#### THE IMPACT OF COLLECTING

The impact of all this collecting has been considerable. Anyone who has collected for several years will say that the artifacts are not as easy to find as when they first started. The thinly soiled sites of the Piedmont, once



discovered, are quickly collected. Paper companies seem to be responsible for most destruction in the Piedmont and Fall Line regions. After clearing stumps, weeds, vines, etc., artifacts are often pushed down hill to the bottom, completely denuding hills that quickly erode down to red clay. Large collections are taken from these sites in a relatively short time.

With many hundreds of sites destroyed yearly from the standpoint of doing meaningful archeology, it could be argued that collectors of these sites could become more beneficial than harmful if encouraged to keep good records and work with the Institute.

An example of this is the Moody site, 38ED31, on Catawba Timber Company land, Edgefield County, South Carolina. All work on this site has been done by amateurs.

It seems our best bet is to encourage the preservation of deep sites, and there is still a large number of these. Although they appear to be exhausted of artifacts, just below the plow zone several feet of undisturbed history may lie. The greatest danger to these does not appear to be collectors but progress. They are a particular favorite of the state and county highway department for borrow pits. I have checked some of these excavations and found artifacts as deep as five feet, safe from the collector that does not dig, but destroyed nevertheless. Can anything be done to salvage these sites?

#### VALUE OF THE SURVEY

The urgency of the collections survey was shown shortly after it began. Three elderly collectors, Mr. Ed Crawford of Winnsboro, Mr. J. E. McTeer of Beaufort, and Mr. Roy J. Lyons of Aiken, passed away. Mr. Lyons died two days before my appointment with him. Another collector has a terminal illness and is too sick to visit.

In the past year one collection has been sold out of state and another is for sale at this time. A collector moved to Virginia and took a large number of artifacts from Bamberg County. Two other collections have been stolen. There must be many other instances of which I have not learned.

There is a ready market for all kinds of artifacts, and the price offered for choice items is persuading many collectors to part with some of their best artifacts. Some sell not realizing how rare an item might be. For others, the chance for profit cannot be refused. Such activities are impossible to stop, but if a spirit of caring for our heritage can be instilled, perhaps it can be held to a minimum.

#### SUMMARY

Looking back on the first phase of the collections survey there is a certain amount of satisfaction about some of the accomplishments: response and cooperation has exceeded my expectations. The names of 291 collectors

have been acquired. One hundred nine have been contacted by phone or personal visits. Thirty collections have been recorded and three are in process, and one hundred twenty-one sites have been recorded.

These activities required trips into 19 counties for a total of 78 days and 27 nights out of town.

Although I was optimistic when the collections survey started, I feel even better today about our chances of obtaining meaningful information. I expect the survey upon completion to provide information that will be useful to students of South Carolina archeology for years to come.

The enthusiasm of the majority of collectors to become involved with the survey has made the task a pleasant undertaking. If we but take the time and put forth the effort to channel this enthusiasm in the right direction, archeology in South Carolina will have taken a step forward.

#### SITES RECORDED

Aiken	- AK 368
Allendale	- AL 116-117
Beaufort	- BU 330-331-332-334-335-336-237-264-262-179-236
Charleston	- CH 440
Chester	- CS 115-116-117-118-119
Georgetown	- GE 194
Hampton	- HA 71-72-73-77-78-79-80-81-82-83 74-75-76
Jasper	- JA 62-63
Kershaw	- KE 47 through 77
Lancaster	- LA 64 through 96
Laurens	- LU 127
Lee	- LE 89-90
Lexington	- LX 234-237
Orangeburg	- OR 82-83-84-85-86-87-88
Richland	- RD 217
Union	- UN 139-140-141-142
York	- YK 86